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ABSTRACT

The design of instructional materials for second language listening comprehension is discussed, based on the premise that such materials must reflect a view of the nature and processes of listening. Two distinct kinds of cognitive processes involved in listening are examined: bottom-up processing, or the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message; and top-down processing, referring to the use of background knowledge in understanding meaning. The two views are explained and illustrated, and the listening comprehension experiences of the language learner at various proficiency levels are examined. The interpersonal and transactional functions of language are then discussed in the framework of bottom-up and top-down processing. This information is applied to the design of classroom materials, focusing on methodological principles employed and activity types developed, and a number of examples of current listening exercises are critiqued from this perspective. It is concluded that in designing and selecting instructional materials for listening comprehension, helping students employ appropriate listening strategies should be a primary focus. (MSE)

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Designing Instructional Materials for Teaching Listening Comprehension

Jack C. Richards

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DESIGNING INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Jack C Richards

An approach to the design of listening comprehension materials and classroom activities reflects a view of the nature of listening and the processes it involves. An understanding of the role of bottom up and top down processes in listening is central to any theory of listening comprehension, as well as recognition of the differences between the interactional and transactional dimensions of language use and how these affect listening. In this paper, these views of listening will first be elaborated and then applied to the design of instructional materials and activities for the teaching of listening comprehension.

1 LISTENING PROCESSES - BOTTOM UP AND TOP DOWN PROCESSING

Two distinct kinds of processes are involved in comprehension, sometimes referred to as "bottom up" and "top down" processing (Chaudron and Richards, 1986). Bottom up processing refers to the use of incoming data as a source of information about the meaning of a message. From this perspective, the process of comprehension begins with the message received, which is analyzed at successive levels of organization - sounds, words, clauses, and sentences - until the intended meaning is arrived at. Comprehension is thus viewed as a process of decoding.

Examples of bottom up processes in listening include the following:

. scanning the input to identify familiar lexical items
. segmenting the stream of speech into constituents, for example in order to recognize that "abookof mine" consists of four words
. using phonological cues to identify the information focus in an utterance
. using grammatical cues to organize the input into constituents, for example, in order to recognize that in "the book which I lent you" [the book] and [which I lent you] constitute major constituents rather than [the book which I] and [lent you].

The listener's lexical and grammatical competence in a language provides the basis for bottom up processing. Our lexical competence serves as a mental dictionary to which incoming words are referred for meaning assignment. Our grammatical competence serves as a set of strategies which are applied to the analysis of incoming data. Clark and Clark (1977: 49) summarize this view of listening comprehension in the following way:

1. They [Listeners] take in raw speech and retain a phonological representation of it in "working memory."
2. They immediately attempt to organize the phonolo gical representation into constituents, identify ing their content and function.
3. As they identify each constituent, they use it to construct underlying propositions, building continually onto a hierarchical representation of propositions.
4. Once they have identified the propositions for a constituent, they retain them in working memory and at some point purge memory of the phonological representation. In doing this, they forget the exact wording and retain the meaning.

Top down processing on the other hand refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message. This background knowledge may take several forms. It may be previous knowledge about the topic of discourse, it may be situational or contextual knowledge, or it may be knowledge stored in long term memory in the form of "schemata" and "scripts" -- plans about the overall structure of events and the relationships between them.

For example, if you see an adult seated on a park bench reading aloud from a book to a group of enthralled young children, you will probably assume that the adult is reading a story to the children - rather than, say, reading a recipe or a set of instructions on how to assemble a computer. This set of expectations for a particular kind of discourse is generated from the situation, that is, from our knowledge of a world populated by adults and children and typical interactions between them. On moving closer, you are able to confirm that the children are indeed listening to a story. Now you can activate your "schemata" for stories. We can think of this as a set of expectations as to how the content of the discourse will develop:

Where does the story take place?
Who are the characters?
Around what event or events does the story turn?
What will the outcome be?

Much of our knowledge of the world consists of knowledge about specific situations, the people we expect to encounter in such situations, what their goals

and purposes are, and how they typically accomplish them. In applying this prior knowledge about people and events to a particular situation, we are able to proceed from the top down. We use the actual discourse we hear to confirm our expectations and to fill out the specific details.

Examples of top down processing in listening include:

. assigning an interaction to part of a particular event, such as story telling, joking, praying, complaining
. assigning places, persons or things to categories
. inferring cause and effect relationships
. anticipating outcomes
. inferring the topic of a discourse
. inferring the sequence between events
. inferring missing details

If we are unable to make use of top down processing, an utterance or discourse may be incomprehensible. Bottom up processing alone often provides an insufficient basis for comprehension. Consider the following narrative, for example. What is the topic?

> Sally first tried setting loose a team of gophers. The plan backfired when a dog chased them away. She then entertained a group of teenagers and was delighted when they brought their motorcycles. Unfortunately, she failed to find a Peeping Tom listed in the Yellow Pages. Furthermore, her stereo system was not loud enough. The crab grass might have worked but she didn't have a fan that was sufficiently powerful. The obscene phone calls gave her hope until the number was changed. She thought about calling a door-to-door salesman but decided to hang up a clothesline instead. It was the installation of blinking neon lights across the street that did the trick. She eventually framed the ad from the classifying section.
>
> (Stein and Albridge, 1978)

At first the narrative is virtually incomprehensible. However once we have a schema to apply to the narrative - "Getting rid of a troublesome neighbour" - we can make use of top down processing and the elements of the story begin to fit into place.

When we first encounter a foreign language, we are heavily dependent upon top down processing. For example, imagine a foreigner who has taken up residence in Japan. The first time she joins a group of Japanese friends for a meal, she hears them utter something which sounds like "Itadakemasu" before they begin eating. She has no idea if this is one word or three, or whether it refers to the food or the participants. After repeated experiences of this kind

however and observation of the position and function the utterance occupies within the speech event of "meal talk", she infers that it is some kind of pre-eating ritual, probably the equivalent of "bon apetit". If she subsequently goes on to learn some Japanese, she will be able to apply her knowledge of Japanese words and grammar to the phrase to arrive at its literal meaning, which is "eat - going to". Initially then, she is entirely dependent upon top down processing - that is, the use of background knowledge - in working out the meaning of the utterance, and only later when her linguistic competence has developed, can she analyze it from the bottom up.

This is how listening comprehension appears to take place at the initial stages in second language learning. For example the Australian Adult Migrant Education Listening Proficiency Descriptions, which are derived from analysis of the listening difficulties of on arrival migrants to Australia and which characterize listening skills across seven levels of proficiency, include the following information concerning listeners at the lowest levels of proficiency:

LEVEL 0.5
No idea of syntactic relationships between words. Responds to isolated items and has to rely almost entirely on context to guess meaning.

Here, the listener is unable to make use of bottom up processing. Gradually, as language learning proceeds, the ability to make use of bottom up processing emerges, as we see in the following descriptions of levels 1, 2 and 3 in the Australian proficiency descriptions;

LEVEL 1
Little understanding of syntax. Meaning deduced from juxtaposition of words and context. Still responds to isolated words in connected speech... Speaker frequently forced to expand or paraphrase when listener's unfamiliarity with syntactic conventions causes misunderstanding.

LEVEL 2
Beginning awareness of grammar but still relies hea vily on stressed words and context to deduce meaning... Can follow very simple, slowly-spoken verbal instructions only if supported by context. Certain areas of English grammar tend to cause severe comprehension problems (eg tense marking, pronoun reference, subordination).

LEVEL 3
Can understand some syntactic clues to meaning, but understanding of grammar very incomplete. In conversation, needs much more redundancy

than native speaker. Sometimes has to ask for clarification where syntax would make meaning clear to native speaker.

(Brindley, personal communication)

By the time the learner is at level four or five on the proficiency scale, there is less of a dependence on context. Context is now used in association with the ability to process the message itself to work our unfamiliar meanings.

Fluent listening thus depends on the use of both top down and bottom up processing. The extent to which one or the other dominates reflects the degree of familiarity the listener has with the topic of discourse, the kind of background knowledge he or she can apply to the task, and the purposes for which he or she is listening. An experienced cook, for example, might listen to a radio chef describing a recipe for coq au vin, merely to compare the chef's recipe with her own. She has a precise schema to apply to the task of listening and listens in order to register similarities or differences. She makes heavy use of top down processes in listening to the radio program. A novice cook however, with little previous cooking experience and unfamiliar with coq au vin, will be required to listen with much greater attention, perhaps in order to write the recipe down. Here, far more bottom up processing is required.

2 LISTENING PURPOSES - INTERPERSONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

As well as recognizing the fundamental difference between top down and bottom up processing in comprehending language, we also need to recognize the very different purposes which listeners may have in different situations, and how these differences in purpose affect the way they go about listening. While numerous classifications exist of the different functions and purposes for which people use language, we will use here a simple but useful distinction made by Brown and Yule (1983) between interactional and transactional functions of language.

I. INTERACTIONAL FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

Interactional uses of language are those where the primary purposes for communication are social. The emphasis is on creating harmonious interactions between participants rather than on the communication of information. The goal for participants in such situations is to make social interaction comfortable and non-threatening and to communicate good will. In the process, information may be communicated but the accurate and orderly presentation of information

is not the primary purpose. Examples of interactional uses of language are greetings, small talk, jokes, complements, casual "chat" of the kind which is used to pass time with friends or to make encounters with strangers comfortable. Brown and Yule suggest that language used in the interactional mode is listener-oriented. Questions of "face" are central, hence interactional conversation is a kind of "work" which we do in order for speaker and hearer to maintain face and to respect the face put forward by others. This is what the sociologist Goffman referred to as "face-work".

For example, a foreman sees a workman sweating profusely as he works on a difficult job and the foreman remarks sympathetically, "It's hard work"; Or a person waiting at a bus stop in a heavy downpour remarks to another person waiting, "Will it ever stop?" In both cases the speaker's primary purpose is not to inform the listener of the obvious but to be identified with the concerns of the other person (Wardhaugh, 1985).

One of the rules of "face work" is that it should elicit agreement. Agreement serves to create harmony and to diminish the threat to the participants' face, hence the importance of small talk on "safe" topics such as the weather, the beauty of gardens, the incompetence of politicians and so on (Brown and Levison, 1978). Brown and Yule add that constant shifts of topic are also characteristic of this mode of talk, illustrating this with an extract from a conversation between some people who have been talking about a couple who visit the area in the summer.

A: you know but erm + they used to go out in erm August + they used to come + you know the lovely sunsets you get + at that time and
B: oh yes
C: there's a nice new postcard a nice - well I don't know how new it is + it's been a while since I've been here + of a sunset + a new one +
A: oh that's a lovely one isn't it
D: yes yes it was in one of the + calendars
A: yes that was last year's calendar it was on
B: was it last year's it was on + it was John Forgan who took that one
A: yes it's really lovely + this year's erm + the Anderson's house at Lenimore's in it + at em Thunderguy I should say +
D: they've sold their house
A: yes + the Andersons
B: oh have they
A: yes yes + erm + they weren't down last year at all

This extract also demonstrates another aspect of interactional discourse which Brown and Yule note - that since it exists largely to satisfy the social needs of the participants at that time, it is extremely boring for an outsider to listen to.

Most conversations are appallingly boring. It is the participation in such conversations which makes us such avid talkers, the "need to know" or the "need to tell" or the "need to be friendly". You can listen to hours and hours of recorded conversation without finding anything that interests you from the point of view of what the speakers are talking about of what they are saying about it. After all, their conversation was not intended for the overhearer. It was intended for them as participants.

(op cit: 82)

Likewise because such discourse is frequently between people who know each other, it assumes shared background knowledge about the topics introduced and hence leaves a great deal unsaid. It is embedded in context. Since the participants are able to fill out the details using top down comprehension it is not necessary to specify things very clearly. Interactional discourse is hence characterized by a high frequency of words whose precise reference is not specified.

II. TRANSACTIONAL FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

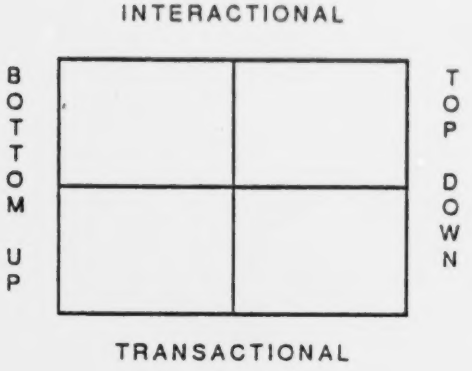
Transactional uses of language are those in which language is being used primarily for communicating information. They are "message" oriented rather than "listener" oriented uses of language. In such instances, accurate and coherent communication of the message is important, as well as confirmation that the message has been understood. Explicitness and directness of meaning is essential, in comparison with interactional language which is often vague and indirect by comparison. With transactional uses of language, coherence, content and clarity are crucial. Brown and Yule observe that completion of some kind of real world task often accompanies transactional uses of language, such as writing down a message or carrying out an instruction. Examples of languge being used primarily for a transactional purpose include news broadcasts, lectures, descriptions and instructions. Brown et al (1984) suggest that this is the kind of talk which dominates classroom life:

Teacher: now + here we have a substance in which heat is moving along the rod from a hot end to a cold end + + can anybody tell me the name we give to such a substance - a substance in which heat can flow + + nobody can tell me that + well + it's called a conductor + + anybody ever heard of that word before? + good well + I'll put it on the blackboard for you + + it's called a conductor + what we are going to do today is have a look at some conductors.

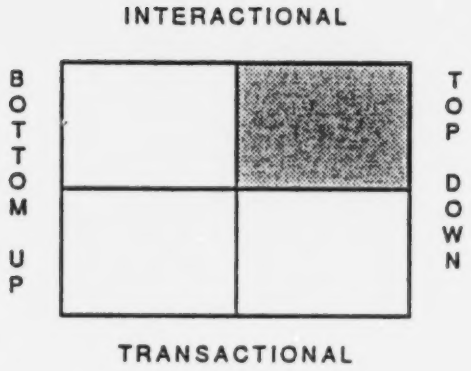
(Brown et al 1984: 9)

Tikunoff (1985) suggests that effective pupil classroom participation requires command of language in both its interactional and transactional functions. Language in its interactional funcations is needed in order to interact with the teacher and peers while accomplishing class tasks, while language in its transactional fuctions is needed in order to acquire new skills, assimilate new information, and construct new concepts. In many situations, both interactional and transactional functions are involved. At the doctor's, for example, the doctor may first use small talk to put the patient at ease, then switch to the transactional mode while asking for a description of the patient's medical problem.

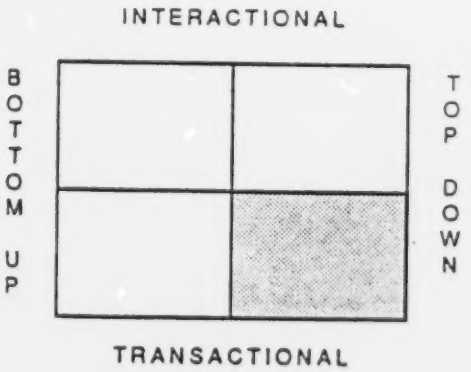
We can use this four-part classification of listening processes and listening purposes as a framework for comparing the different demands of different listening activites. Listening activities may be located at different positions within the following quadrant;



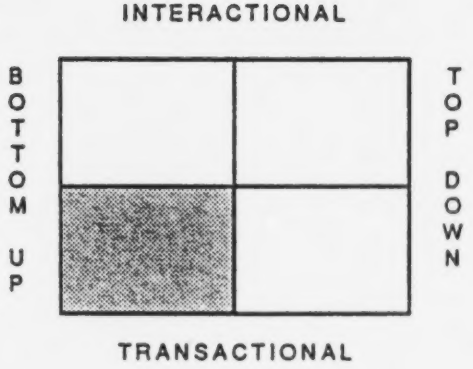
Consider a person listening to cocktail party banter for example, during which friends greet each other, exchange compliments and other customary rituals, and engage in small talk on fleeting topics of no import to anyone present. Such an activity I would locate in the following position on the quadrant;



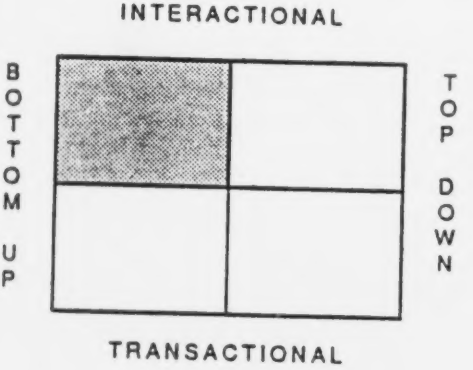
Now consider an experienced air traveller on an aircraft listening to a flight attendant reading the air safety instructions before the plane takes off. This can be located in the following position on the quadrant;



An activity which is transactional but which requires more use of bottom up processing, such as a student driver receiving his or her first driving lesson from a driving instructor would look like this on the quadrant;



An activity which would involve bottom up processing within an interactional situation would be that of a party goer listening intently to someone trying to tell a joke and trying to identify the appropriate place in the anecdote for him or her to laugh.



3 APPLICATIONS TO DESIGN OF CLASSROOM MATERIALS: METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Before we go on to consider how we can make use of the theoretical perspectives on listening discussed above in designing instructional materials, we need to identify a methodological position which is consistent with our understanding of the processes involved in listening. While there are plenty of available methodologies in language teaching, most attempt to account only for production rather than comrehension and hence will not serve our purposes here. The following are some tentative methodological principles which acknowledge the perspective on listening we have discussed.

I. MAKE MEANING THE GOAL

Both bottom up and top down processing serve as means to an end - the identification of the speaker's intended meaning. It follows that classroom activities should give priority to developing strategies for recognizing and using meaning, rather than serving as tests for information recall or excuses for manipulation of language.

II. CREATE VALID PURPOSES FOR LISTENING

We saw that the interactional and transactional functions of language involve very different purposes for listening. These distinct purposes should be kept in mind in developing listening exercises and materials, since responses appropriate for interactional listening will be very different from those required when listening for transactional purposes. Students should not listen to casual conversation with the same goals as they listen to a lecture. Similarly, in the real world, people do not listen to news reports in order to count the number of occurences of the past tense, nor should they be expected to do so in second language classrooms.

III. FOCUS ON PROFICIENCY

A proficient listener uses both top down and bottom up listening strategies, can handle a wide variety of types of listening, and can cope with listening circumstances, where distractions, interference, and incomplete transmission of meanings may occur. A listening programme should likewise allow the learner to develop strategies for listening in a wide variety of situations and for varying

but relevant purposes. In this way the programme prepares the learner to make the transition from the classroom to the real world.

IV. TEACH, PRACTICE, AND THEN TEST

It is necessary to distinguish activities which have a teaching focus from activities which have a testing focus. An activity with a teaching focus assumes that the student does not yet possess a particular skill and provides the opportunity for the student to develop it through planned presentation and practice. An activity which has a testing focus seeks to determine how much the student has learned as a result of previous teaching.

Dictation, for example, is a strategy for testing, not teaching.

4. APPLICATIONS TO DESIGN OF CLASSROOM MATERIALS: TYPES

The kinds of exercises and listening activities we use in teaching listening comprehension will reflect the different processes and purposes involved in listening - bottom up, top down, interactional and transactional.

I. EXERCISES WHICH DEAL WITH BOTTOM UP LISTENING

These seek to develop the learner's ability to do the following:

* retain input while it is being processed
* recognize word divisions
* recognize key words in utterances
* use knowledge of word order patterns to identify constituents in utterances
* recognize grammatical relations between key ele ments in sentences
* recognize the function of word stress in sentences
* recognize the function of intonation in sentences

Exercises which address these goals might require the learners to do tasks such as the following:

identify the referents of pronouns used in a conversation
recognize if a sentence is active or passive
distinguish between sentences containing causative and non-causative verbs

distinguish major consituents in a sentence, such as subject and object, verb and adverb
distinguish between sentences with and without auxiliary verb
recognize the different menaings implied by different patterns of word pitch
recognize the time reference of a sentence
distinguish netween positive and negative statements
identify prepositions in rapid speech
recognize sequence markers
distinguish between Yes-No and Wh questions

(Gore, 1978; McLean, 1981; Richards, et al 1987)

II. EXERCISES WHICH DEAL WITH THE TOP DOWN LISTENING

These seek to develop the learner's ability to do the following:

* use key words to construct the schema of a dis course
* construct plans and schema from elements of a discourse
* infer the role of the participants in a situation
* infer the topic of a discourse
* infer the outcome of an event
* infer the cause or effect of an event
* infer unstated details of a situation
* infer the sequence of a series of events
* infer comparisons
* distinguish between literal and figurative mean ings
* distinguish between facts and opinions

Exercises which address these goals might require the learner to do tasks such as the followng:

listen to part of a conversation and infer the topic of the conversation
look at pictures and then listen to conversations about the pictures and match them with the pictures
listen to conversations and identify the setting for the conversation
read a list of key points to be covered in a talk and then number and check whether the information was mentioned or not
read one side of a telephone conversation and guess the other speaker's responses: then listen to the telephone conversation
look at pictures of people speaking and guess what they might be saying or doing: then listen to their actual conversations
complete a story, then listen to how the story really ended

guess what news headlines might refer to then listen to news broadcasts about the events referred to

(Fassman and Tavares, 1985; Rost, 1986; Richards, et al 1987; Bode and Lee, 1987)

//

III. EXERCISES WHICH DEAL WITH LISTENING FOR INTERACTIONAL PURPOSES

These seek to develop the learner's ability to do the following:

* recognize when language is being used for inter actional purposes
* recognize appropriate moments to make phatic res ponses in a conversation
* recognize such illocutionary intentions as jokes, complements, praise
* recognize differences between topics used in small talk and those used as real topics in conversa tions
* recognize markers of familiarity and social dis tance between speakers

Exercises which address these goals might require the learner to do tasks such as the following:

distinguish between conversations that have an interactional and a transactional intent

listen to conversations and select suitable polite comments and other phatic responses

listen to utterances containing complements or praise and choose suitable responses

listen to conversations containing small talk and recognize when the speaker is preparing to intro duce a real topic

identify the degree of familiarity between real invitations and invitations being used to close a conversation

(Lougheed, 1985; Richards, et al 1987)

IV. EXERCISES WHICH DEAL WITH LISTENING FOR TRANSACTIONAL PURPOSES

These seek to develop the learner's ability to do the following:

* extract key information from a discourse
* identify specific facts and details in a discourse

* recognize and act on the illocutionary intent of a discourse, such as requests, advice, commands, instructions
* identify the sequence in which a series of events occured
* carry out tasks as a response to listening

Exercises which address these goals might require the learner to do tasks such as the following:

label the parts of an object from a description of it
identify the key ideas in a discourse
follow instructions to assemble an item
complete a map or picture from an aural description
write a summary of a talk or conversation
write down a message delivered aurally
identify a picture from a description of it
listen to an advertisement for a job and note down the job requirements
(Blundell and Stokes, 1981; Rost, 1986; Richards, et al 1987)

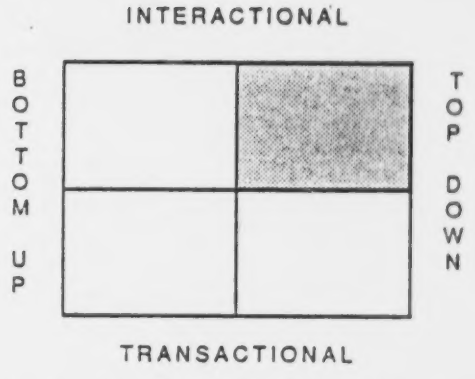
5 CRITIQUE OF LISTENING EXERCISES

We will now consider samples from current listening materials and examine them in terms of the criteria for materials design discussed above. A text which includes a great deal of authentic conversational discourse is Listening in and Speaking Out: Intermediate (James, Whitley and Bode, 1980). this text includes unscripted conversations and discussions in an attempt to prepare students for listenig to authentic native speaker discourse rather than the often artificial discourse provided when actors read from written scripts. Unit 1 deals with listening to conversations between friends talking about birthday parties and gifts. Part of the unit involves to the following conversation:

1. CHUCK: You know, I really don't like having to give gifts on like Christmases and birthdays and stuff, but I like giving gifts very much on times when I just feel like doing so.
2. SHARON: I do too. And I give gifts to a lot of people that way. I, uh, maybe like giving gifts at Christmas too, but not so much as an adult. When I was little, I did.
3. BETTE: Well, what kind of gifts do you like to give, Sharon?
4. SHARON: Almost anything. I mean, sometimes, uh, gum or cigarettes or ...(laughter)
5. GARY: You give gum?
6. BETTE: You really go all out, don't you? (laughter)

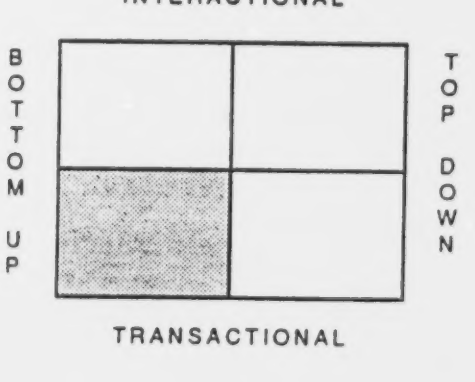
7. SHARON: Well, no, but what I mean is, you know, if I walk by a store and I see a kind of foreign cigarettes and I know somebody likes them and doesn't usually buy them for themselves, I , you know, I might pick up a pack and give them to somebody.
8. CHUCK: Yeah, that's nice.
9. GARY: When do you give...
10. BETTE: How about you, Gary?
11. GARY: When you...when do you...sorry...when do you give packages of gum? (laughter)
12. SHARON: Well, just recently, my mother's been here and she likes to chew gum and I don't usually buy it, but when I see it now, you know, I might stop and just give her a pack of gum.
13. GARY: Mmm
14. SHARON: Just for fun.
15. GARY: I like to give gifts.
16. SHARON: Yeah, I know you do.
17. BETTE: You want to give me one? (laughter)
18. GARY: Well, it's not your birthday, is it?
19. CHUCK: Do you...Gary, do you like to give, do you like giving gifts any time or just at certain times?
20. GARY: Yeah, I was going to say, uh, it's not Bette birthday and I like to give gifts at appropriate occasions. I differ with you on that. At Christmas and birthdays, anniversaties and things like that, I like to give gifts.
21. BETTE: You're rather formalistic, then?
22. GARY: Very so that way.
23. SHARON: But I think you have...much better memory than the rest of us. I think one reason I like to give gifts all the time is 'cause re, never remember the appropriate times.
24. GARY: Well, you have to have a system of re-, recording.
25. CHUCK: Yeah, I have that problem also.
26. SHARON: Yeah. Yeah, I, 'cause I have so many brothers and sisters and other people, I don't remember birthdays and stuff.
27. CHUCK: You can write it down.

This conversation demonstrates language being used for primarily interactional purposes. The topics of birthdays and giving gifts are ones for which listeners have readily available schema, hence the situation can be represented as follows;



The conversation also illustrates several features of interactional discourse noted earlier. It is extremely boring, since as Brown and Yule observe, such conversations serve to satisfy the social needs of the participants and have little value or interest for an outsider. One's response on listening to such an extract is likely to be "So what?" or "Who cares?" Appropriate tasks to use in listening to this kind of discourse might include recognizing the number of speakers involved, what their relationships might be (eg friends or stangers), and what the purpose of the conversation might be (eg trying to choose a birthday gift or simply passing time).

Unfortunately the text does not lead in this direction. Instead, the conversation is treated as if it were an example of transactional discourse, one in which the comment of the conversation is crucial, and where evey item of the conversation must be identified through bottom up processing. Hence it is treated as an example of the following;



Thus students are asked to listen to the conversation as many times as possible and complete a comprehension task;

Read these statements about the discussion. Listen to the recording as amny times as you like. Then choose the best answer for each of the statements, and write the letter in the space.

1. Chuck and Sharon like to give gifts _____.
   a. at appropriate times
   b. at special times
   c. when they feel they should
   d. when they feel like it

2. Everyone except Sharon thought gum was ____ gift.
   a. an appropriate
   b. a memorble
   c. a required
   d. a funny

3. Sharon likes to buy small things that people _____.
   a. might usually buy for themselves
   b. might not buy for themselves
   c. might not have enough money to buy
   d. might not really want

4. Gary likes to give gifts _____.
   a. at appropriate times
   b. at unexpected times
   c. that are expensive
   d. that are inexpensive

5. Gary believes _____ is important for remembering when to give gifts.
   a. a calendar
   b. a special form
   c. a system of recording
   d. a system of choosing

Later in the same unit, students are asked to listen to the conversation as many times as are needed in order to complete a partial transcript of the conversation;

FILLING IN

Listen to the recording, and fill in the blanks. You may listen to the discussion as many times as you need to.

CHUCK: You know, I really don't like having to give gifts on like Christmases and birthdays and stuff, but I like giving very much on times when I just feel like doing it.

SHARON: I do too. And _____ (1) give gifts to a _____ (2) of people that way. _____ (3), uh, maybe I like giving _____ (4) at Christmas too, but _____ (5) so much as an _____ (6). When I was little, _____ (7) did.

BETTE: Well, what kind _____ (8) gifts do you like _____ (9) give, Sharon?

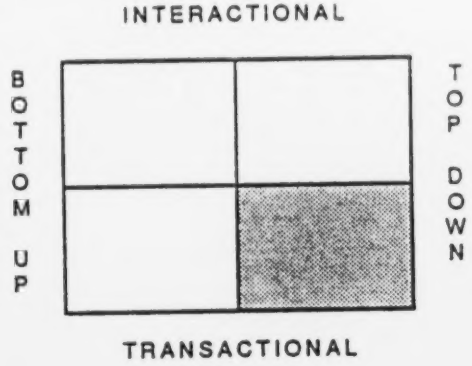
SHARON: Almost anything. _____ (10) mean, sometimes, uh, gum or _____ (11) or ...(laughter)

A listening text with a different focus is News Tapes (White, 1977), which focuses on listening to news stories. Listening to news broadcasts is a good example of a transactional purpose for listening. Research on accounts of news events shows that readers and listeners apply specific schemata or scripts to the task. The script "is the catalyst between reader and text that allows a top down approach" (Zuck and Zuck, 1984: 147). The script is "a predetermined, stereo-

typed sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation" (Schank and Abelson, 1977: 41) or "a set of stereotypic expectations about listening to a news broadcast about a political event such as a change in power or political leadership, Zuck and Zuck report that some of the obligatory concepts anticipated are:

Who is the new leader?
How did the leader come to power?
Was the ascension to power anticipated?
What is the reaction of others to this change?
What do we know about the new leader?
What problems will the new leader be facing?

This kind of listening can hence be represented as:



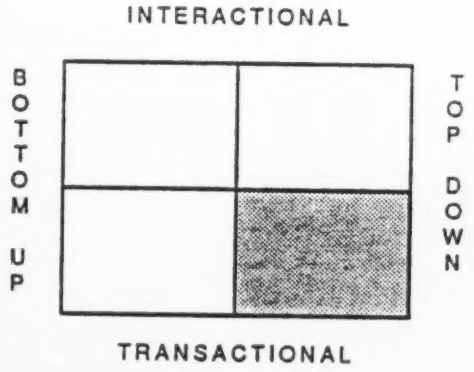
Now let us see how White's text approaches the problem of listening to a news broadcast. In unit one, the student listens to the following on tape.

An automobile accident in Chicago killed two young children yesterday. The accident happened at 4.40 in the afternoon on a Chicago freeway. The children, an eight-year-old girl and a seven-year-old boy, were riding in the back seat of their father's car. They were returning from school at the time. There was a lot of traffic on the road and it was raining very hard. When the father tried to slow down to leave the freeway, the car started to slide on the wet road. The father was unable to control the car, and it hit a lamp post and then crashed into another car. The policeman called an ambulance, and the ambulance took the father and the children to the hospital. The father was seriously hurt and will be in the hospital for a long time, but both the children died in the ambulance.

This is followed by a transcription task. The students listen to the "news broadcast" and complete a partial transcription of it. Subsequent exercises involve drills based on grammar points contained in the text, summarizing, and further transcription exercise.

Clearly these activities have nothing to do with how we listen to news broadcasts. The listening tasks set in the text involve exclusively bottom up rather than top down processing. No attempt is made to activate or make use of an appropriate script for traffic accident stories, nor are the tasks set appropriate for transactional listening.

In a unit on listening to news broadcasts in Listen for It (Richards, Gordon and Harper, 1987), news broadcasts are used as a basis for top down rather than exclusively bottom up processing, reflecting the following view of this kind of listening activity.



Before the students listen to a news broadcast, they read headlines and stories about news events. They are asked to guess what the headlines are about. Both tasks help develop a "script" which students can apply to the listening task.

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Starting out

Look at these newspaper headlines. What do you think each story is about?

Mail Carriers Won't Deliver Mail To Nudists

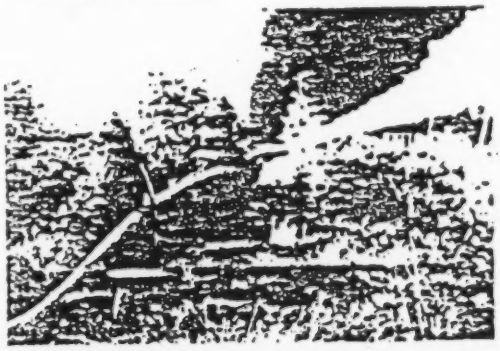
SMITH CITY, Ohio, May 16—Mothers at the Hot Springs Nudist Camp won't be getting their Mother's Day cards this year as the strike of mail carriers continues. Roy Hesser, president of Local 212 of the Mail Carriers' Union, proclaims, "We will not be intimidated by a group of crazy people who refuse to put clothes on! Don't they know that we're decent folk who just want to bring mail to normal people?"

It's been seven weeks now since mail has been delivered to Hot Springs.

Teenagers Arrested For Computer Crimes

Value Of Dollar Falls, But Yen Rises

Fire Fighters Try To Save Homes In California Forest



FRESNO, Calif., April 17—Fires were still reported raging out of control today in six major areas of Kern County, situated in the magnificent Sierra Nevadas. Homeowners have evacuated San Coachella and portions of Salton City, but firefighters caution that today's prevailing westerly winds are putting their homes in severe jeopardy.

Damage to homes already lost has been estimated at $8.5 million, according to Helen E. Watson, a spokesperson for American Insurers, Inc., the major insurers of homes in the county.

Space Shuttle Delayed

Better Security On International Flights

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They then listen to the following news stories, taken from actual news broadcasts.

DIANE MARTINET: Good afternoon. This is Diane Martinet with the midday on KALF. Fires in California continue to burn out of control, and several small towns in the forests near San Francisco are still in danger. One of the greatest dangers to the 500 fire fighters, however, comes not from the fires, but from plants in the forest - poison ivy plants. Many fire fighters have had skin problems after touching the plants, and at least three have had to go to the hospital for treatment for their skin problems.

Following recent airline hijackings, the International Airline Association, the IAA, has been meeting in Washington this week. The IAA has been discussing ways to improve security and has introduced several new measures. Beginning in January, improved security measures will include more armed security guards on international flights and special training for pilots.

NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Agency, today announced in Florida that the next Space Shuttle mission has been cancelled. The mission was scheduled for an 11.30 am takeoff on Tuesday. However, the flight has been cancelled because of problems with the shuttle's central computer system. NASA technicians noticed the computer problems during last minute checks.

Seven teenage computer specialists have been arrested by police in New Jersey. After taking an advanced computer course at school, the seven boys, all from Princeton, New Jersey, learned how to obtain top secret information from government computers in Washington. They also started to use their home computers to make free long-distance telephone calls.

In New York, the value of the dollar stayed the same today. But in Tokyo, the dollar fell dramatically. At the end of the day, it was worth 183 yen, compared to 195 yen yesterday.

And members of a Smith City, Ohio, nudist camp will start receiving their mail again soon. The Postal Service has received complaints from some of the mail delivery personnel who were embarrassed by the appearance of the nudists, and three weeks ago the Postal Service said they would no longer deliver mail to the camp. But - good news for the nudists - following an agreement made today, the Postal Service has said it will provide regular mail delivery on one condition: When the mail is delivered, residents MUST either remain indoors or wear clothes. Well!

And now here's Joe Santos with the sports news. Joe, isn't it a little cold this time of year in Ohio? Especially for nudists! Well, it's been a strange week for baseball! During the game between...

On first listening, students are given a simple task - identifying where each event took place:

1a. Listen to the news programme. Draw a line between a newspaper headline and the place where the story happened.

Place	Headline
NEW YORK	POSTAL SERVICE MAKES AGREEMENT WITH NUDISTS
WASHINGTON	FIRE FIGHTERS TRY TO SAVE HOMES IN CALIFORNIA FOREST
FLORIDA	VALUE OF DOLLAR FALLS BUT YEN RISES
CALIFORNIA	TEENAGERS ARRESTED FOR COMPUTER CRIMES
NEW JERSEY	SPACE SHUTTLE DELAYED
OHIO	BETTER SECURITY ON INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Students then listen again and indicate whether statements which summarize the key information in the news stories are true or false:

1b. Read these statements. Listen to the news program again, and say if the statements are True(T) or False(F).

☐ 1. There was a small fire near San Fransisco.

☐ 2. Poisonous plants are a problem to the fire fighters

☐ 3. Better security is needed on airplanes.

☐ 4. There will not be armed security personnel on international airplanes.

☐ 5. The space shuttle will take off on Tuesday.

☐ 6. The boys used their computers to make telephone calls.

☐ 7. The boys were selling secrets to the Russians.

☐ 8. The dollar has risen in value.

☐ 9. The dollar is worth 183 yen today.

☐ 10. The nudists have not received mail fo over a year.

☐ 11. The nudists must stay inside when the mail comes.

The tasks set hence reflect valid purposes in listening to news broadcasts - identifying what happened and where it happened - and allow students to use a top down rather than bottom up approach to listening.

Another text which contains exercises designed to prepare students to use a top down approach to transactional listening is Now Hear This (Foley, 1984). In Unit Eleven, for example, students listen to a description of work in a toy manufacturing factory. Before they listen they discuss factory work and are prepared for some of the vocabulary they will hear in the passage. A picture is also provided which sets the scene and thus established a script for the description they will hear. Following these activities, which provide a basis for top down processing, the students hear the following description:

It's July. The temperature is 89 degrees. the workers at Toy World are busy getting ready for Christmas. Toy World manufactures children's toys. It operates many short assembly lines. This area assembles dolls. The doll parts arrive from Hong Kong. They come in large boxes, one for arms, another for legs, one for bodies, another for heads. Bill and James unpack the boxes and put the parts on the line. They put a head, a body, one left arm, one right arm, one left leg, and one right leg in each box. Olga installs a voice box in the back of each doll. The dolls can say "Mommy", "Daddy", and "night-night." Then, Tony and Marta assemble the dolls. Sometimes a part doesn't fit, so there are extra parts next to the line. Then Ana dresses the dolls. She put pink pajamas on some dolls, yellow pajamas on others. George packs the dolls in boxes. The front of each box is clear plastic so that children and their parents can see the doll in the box. He puts the smaller boxes into a larger one. Mark loads these boxes onto a truck.

Toy World is busy from May to November. During these months, it operates three shifts. But all the toys have to be on store shelves by November. From December to April, business is slow and many workers get laid off. Usually, only one shift operates.

Students complete the following exercises on listening to the description:

C. First listening. Look at the picture and listen to the story. After you listen, tell the class any information you remember about the story.

D. Second listening. Listen to the story again. Write the name of each worker on the picture. Then match the workers and their jobs.

1. Bill and James	a. installs a voice box
2. Olga	b. assemble the dolls
3. Tony and Marta	c. put the parts on the line
4. Ana	d. loads the truck
5. George	e. dresses the dolls
6. Mark	f. packs the dolls in boxes

E. Third listening. Read these statements. Then listen to the tape a third time. After you listen write T if the statement is true, F if the statement is false.

___ 1. It's winter at Toy World.
___ 2. There are many assembly lines in this factory.
___ 3. The parts arrive in different boxes.
___ 4. Bill and James put all the heads in one box, and the bodies in another.
___ 5. The dolls can say "Bye-bye".
___ 6. If a part doesn't fit, there are extra parts next to the line.
___ 7. Ana puts pretty dresses on the dolls.
___ 8. Children can see into the box because the front is plastic.
___ 9. Toy World is very busy in December.
___ 10. The toys have to be on toy shelves by September.

These tasks seem appropriate since they focus on listening for meaning and direct attention to appropriate aspects of the story. Unfortunately, however, the unit does not stop here. The author gets trapped into using the description for "doing language work". Exercises follow which attempt to exploit some of the grammar of the description and which ultimately require the student to complete a partial transcription of the text. This latter exercise has now led the students away from using a top down approach in getting the essential meaning of the text and requires them to listen and remember specific words - an irrelevant task and one which requires exclusively bottom up processing.

An exercise which is more successful in requiring appropriate listening processes for different kinds of listening tasks is seen in Unit 4 of Fast Forward (Fassman and Tavares 1985). As a preparation for listening to the job announcements on a radio programme, students first predict what they expect the requirements for specific jobs might be.

Getting Ready

The State Employment Agency is an organization that helps people find jobs. You are going to listen to a radio program called Jobs Unlimited where you will hear about some employment opportunities that the State Employment Agency has to offer. But first, you'll read some newspaper ads for the same jobs.

1. Look at the ad for the Savey Hotel. What other requirements besides "do light bookkeeping" would you expect to hear in as advertisment for a secretary?

> The Savey Hotel has an immediate opening for a secretary. Light bookkeeping required. Contact Ms Johnson at (111) 838-1728

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

2. Look at the ad for WESL Radio. What qualities besides "a dynamic personality" might be required of a disc jockey?

> Great opportunity for DJ. If you're an experienced disc jockey with a dynamic personality, call (111) 432-6153 RIGHT NOW!!

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

3. Look at the ad from Mercy Hospital. One of the requirements is "A chauffeur's licence." What kind of job do you think they are advertising? What other requirements might there be?

> Mercy Hospital has openings for people with chauffeur's licenses. Excellent benefits. Call Mr Jordan at (111) 979-6424

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4. The Mundus Travel Agency requests someone who can "work with figures." For what kinds of jobs would this skill be needed? What other requirements would you expect?

> Mundus Travel Agency is looking for an energetic person who is interested in the world. Must be able to work with figures. Contact Ms Cheng at (111) 919-5310.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Then the students listen to radio announcements about each job and complete brief notes:

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The task here does not require students to attempt to identify every word heard in the announcement. Rather, the students must attempt to identify key information, a task for which the pre-listening activity has given them a script.

CONCLUSIONS

In developing classroom activities and materials for teaching listening comprehension, a clear understanding is needed of the nature of top down and bottom up approaches to listening and how these processes relate to different kinds of listening purposes. Too often, listening texts require students to adopt a single approach in listening, one which demands a detailed understanding of the content of a discourse and the recognition of every word and structure that occures in a text. Students should not be required to respond to interactional discourse as if it were being used for a transactional purpose, nor should they be expected to use a bottom up approach to an aural text if a top down one is more appropriate. Ways of using listening passages should be explored which help students employ appropriate listening strategies for particular listening purposes.

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